

Message Text

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ACTION HA-05

INFO OCT-01 EA-10 NEA-11 IO-13 ISO-00 EUR-12 CIAE-00
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R 010911Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5466
INFO AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
CINCPAC HONOLULU
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
USMISSION GENEVA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMCONSUL MANDALAY POUCH

C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 1970

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF, BM, BG
SUBJECT: PRESS TOUR OF ARAKAN STATE

1. A PARTY OF SOME FORTY PRESSMEN, PREDOMINANTLY BURMESE, VISITED THE ARAKAN STATE MAY 28 TO 30 ON A GOVERNMENT-ORGANIZED TOUR. INCLUDED IN THE GROUP WERE TWO RUSSIANS, THE LOCALLY ACCREDITED TASS AND IZVESTIA CORRESPONDENTS, AND ONE CHINESE NCNA MAN, AS WELL AS ALL THE BURMESE INTERNATIONAL WIRE SERVICE REPRESENTATIVES.

2. THE TOUR WAS REPORTED IN GREAT DETAIL IN THE GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED PRESS ON MAY 31. THE CONTENTS, HOWEVER, ADD LITTLE FACTUAL INFORMATION TO WHAT HAS ALREADY BEEN PUBLISHED HERE REGARDING EVENTS IN THE ARAKAN STATE. IT CONSISTED MAINLY OF LENGTHY QUOTATIONS FROM MILITARY AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS
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REITERATING THE STANDARD GOVERNMENT LINE THAT THE MASS EXODUS OF MUSLIMS WAS VOLUNTARY, THAT NO FORCE WAS USED ("NOT A SHOT WAS FIRED"), THAT EVERY EFFORT WAS MADE TO DISSUADE PEOPLE FROM LEAVING BUT THAT THEY WERE INCITED TO FLEE BY BANDITS AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS. GUB OFFICIALS RENEWED THE OFFER TO TAKE BACK ALL THOSE WHO CAN PROVE THEY ARE LEGALLY ENTITLED TO LIVE IN BURMA.

3. THE ONLY NEW FACTUAL INFORMATION PUBLISHED WAS THE STATEMENT THAT 65,452 MUSLIMS FLED FROM MAUNGDAW TOWNSHIP AND 35,546 FROM BITHADAUNG TOWNSHIP. THE EMBASSY UNDERSTANDS THESE FIGURES ARE BASED ON THE ESTIMATED NUMBER OF INHABITANTS IN HOUSES FOUND EMPTY OR BURNED, AND IS THEREFORE NOT PARTICULARLY ACCURATE. THE ARTICLE ALSO QUOTES A GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL AS SAYING THE GUB DOES NOT KNOW THE OVERALL TOTAL. ANOTHER INTERESTING STATISTIC GIVEN WAS THAT IN MAY 1977 THE POPULATION OF BITHADAUNG TOWN WAS 140,641 MUSLIMS AND 24,552 OF OTHER FAITHS, WHILE MAUNGDAW TOWN HAD 212,104 MUSLIMS AND 24,963 OF OTHER FAITHS.

4. LOCAL JOURNALISTS WHO MADE THE TRIP TOLD US THAT REPORTERS WERE GIVEN SURPRISING FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT CONSIDERING THE JUNKET WAS UNDER GOVERNMENT AUSPICES. THEY SAID INTERVIEWS WITH MUSLIMS FAILED TO SUPPORT ALLEGATIONS OF FORCEFUL EJECTION OF BENGALIS, BUT RATHER TENDED TO CONFIRM THAT THOSE WHO FLED DID SO OUT OF FEAR, NOT AS A RESULT OF MISTREATMENT. SOME OF THE MUSLIMS COMPLAINED TO THE REPORTERS ABOUT THE ARREST OF WOMEN AND THE USE OF MOSQUES BY BUDDHIST IMMIGRATION AUTHORITIES FOR NIGHTTIME LODGING. THE ARAKANESE MINORITY IN THE BORDER AREA REPORTEDLY IS IN GREAT FEAR OF MUSLIM REPRISALS ONCE THE ARMY AND IMMIGRATION OFFICIALS WITHDRAW FROM THE AREA. BEAN

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